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# THE COORG TRIBES AND CASTES

(WITH 27 ILLUSTRATIONS)

BY

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*With a Foreword*
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R. E. ENTHOVEN, C.I.E.,
OXFORD.

GORDON PRESS
MADRAS
1948

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# COORG TRIBES AND CASTES

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

COORG is a small British Province perched on the slopes of the Western Ghats. It has an area of about 1,593 square miles of which the reserved forests occupy about 519 square miles. It is bounded on the north and east by the Hassan and Mysore districts; and on the south and west by the Malabar and South Canara districts of the Madras Presidency. It is an extremely hilly country and is situated on the summits and slopes of the Western Ghats. Its maximum length is about 60 miles from north to south, and maximum breadth about 60 miles east to west. The name of Coorg is an anglicized corruption of the word *Kodagu*. It is said to be derived from the Canarese term *Kodagu* meaning 'steep' or 'hilly'. The people are called *Kodagas*. In the Coorg language, the country is Kodagu and the people Kodavas.

### Natural Features—Mountains and Their Formations

The main range of the Western Ghats extends from Subramania in the north-west to the western point of the Brahmagiri in the south for a distance of over 60 miles. From this backbone several long and elongated ridges branch off from east to west. The grand mountain mass of Subramania rises to a height of 5,625 feet above sea level. Among the many

A View of Talai Cauvery

The junction of the Kanaka and the Cauvery at Bajamandala

[facing p.2]

133 ridges branching off from this part of the Ghats, the most remarkable is the one which attains the greatest height in the double peaked Kotebetta (5,375 ft.) situated 9 miles north of Mercara. Near Mercara the Bengunad [491] Range starts west of the Ghats forming an acute angle with them. At this point is Brahmagiri, the source of the Cauvery river, and north of it is the Sampaji valley through which descends the road to Mangalore on the west coast. Continuing on the line of the Ghats which runs south-east from here, the most important peaks are the well-wooded Tumbemala, Iggutappa, Devarabetta, Tadiandamol (5,729 ft.), and Somamala. Some distance to the south is the Periambadi ghat road to Cannanore and Tellicherry on the west coast. In the extreme south-west is the Marenad Range with the great lateral range of the Brahmagiris, which form the southern boundary of the country, separating it from Wynad. The highest peak in this range is Devasibetta (4,500 ft.) which towers up from a beautiful plateau called Huyalemale. Many spurs from the Brahmagiris branch off over the whole of Kiggatnad, producing a ramification of narrow ridged hills, some ascending in almost solitary grandeur like Ambatebetta near Virarajendrapet, Bittangala, and Kundadabetta, others subsiding into the undulating slopes of the eastern elevations, enclosing innumerable rice fields, some of which are the most extensive in Coorg. The Bengunad Range also extends eastwards in two ridges south of Mercara. One culminates in the pointed peak of Nurokkalbetta, the other takes a zigzag line towards Fraserpet, its highest point being Kallurbetta, clothed with teak forests. From Kotebetta northwards runs the Santhalli hills, terminating in the bluff Mukribetta. From the northern frontier a range runs south to the Cauvery, in which are the fine conical peak of Malambi (4,468 ft.) and the Kanagalu hill.

137 Coorg was primarily well wooded, and although a vast tract was [249] cleared for coffee cultivation, it still conveys this impression, when one has a general view of it from the summit of a hill. In many parts of Coorg (South) impenetrable evergreen forests and bamboo jungles have a luxuriant growth. Towards the east and north, the country varies from the park-like tracts of Yelusaresime to the bare grass hills of Yedavanad and the thick deciduous jungle that fringes the Cauvery. The sandal tree 133 is found in abundance in the north-eastern parts. On a bright November [137] morning, an observer from the heights of Brahmagiri is in rapturous delight at the picturesque view that opens out before him. Ridge after ridge of grassy or forest-clad hills appear, now gently sloping down in wavy lines, now bold and abrupt, now raising their steep summits into the clear blue air. Kudaremukhabetta bursts into view from Canara, the Bettadapur and Chamundi hills in Mysore, the Wynad mountains of Malabar, and even the distant range of the Nilgiris are clearly visible, while in the west at a distance of about 30 miles below

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Pilgrims at Bejamandala

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Pilgrims performing religious rites at Bejamandala

[facing p. 3]

## INTRODUCTION



the steep precipices of the Ghats are the coast line of Malabar and South Canara, intersected by broad, bright, serpentine rivers, and beyond, the dark blue Indian Ocean, dotted with sailing craft. The eastern frontier between the Cauvery and Lakshmana rivers exhibits an almost uninterrupted jungle inhabited by the Kurumbar, Lambani, and other wandering tribes. 133

### River Systems

Coorg is well favoured with rivers and streamlets which give it an abundant and perennial water supply throughout the year except South Coorg where there is a dearth of it. Though perennial, they are not remarkable for their breadth. Of the rivers that flow eastward, the most important are the following :—

The Barapole, rising in the Brahmagiris with its tributary the Kallhole descending from the Hebbale pass; the Udormbi, the Yeramakuth, the Cadiamale, and the Mundrotu rivers from the Padinalkanad Range. The Yertakarti and Nujikal rivers descend from the Pattighat, and the Maringundi river from the Pushpagiri Range.

Rivers of the eastern watershed consist of the Cauvery and its tributaries. The Cauvery has its source at Talai Cauvery near Bagamandala and is the largest and most important river in Coorg. Its tributaries are the Ramathirtha and the Lakshmanathirtha, both of which rise in South Coorg and join the Cauvery in the Mysore Province. The Kakkabe, Kadanur, Muttamudi, and Chickle rivers, all of which assume considerable dimensions during the monsoon, rise in Padinalkanad and Mercara taluks, while the Hatti, Nadapur and Choran rivers from the Harangai river, and powerful tributaries rise in Nanjarajapatna taluk.

### Flora

The flora of Coorg is typical of the prevailing vegetation throughout the Western Ghats. According to Conner, every species of vegetation attains a high degree of luxuriance, if not rankness, quite foreign in the neighbouring countries. Both flowers and blossoms have a brilliancy and variety unknown in the plains, and many of the wild plants possess a share of aromatic qualities both as to odour and flavour. The all-prevailing forest is distinguished by the people as Male-kadu (evergreen mountain forest), and the Kanave-kadu (deciduous growth at the lower levels of the passes). Arborescent growth at higher elevations varying from 3,500 feet is mostly represented by Vateria indica, Canarium strictum, Calophyllum tomentosum, Michelia champaka, Polyalthia coffeoides and others. 137

### Fauna

Elephants range throughout all parts of Coorg. They frequent the forests towards the eastern frontier. They are not so numerous as before. 136

136 Since 1902 systematic arrangements have been made by Government for their capture in pits as in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Bisons frequent the densest forests and highest hills, especially in Maranad and Hormalnad. Bears generally abound in the north-west. Tigers and leopards are also found. Sambur, spotted deer, and barking deer are general in the woods. The most important bird is the hornbill, but there are peacocks, water fowl and jungle-cock, over and above the most ordinary and common Indian birds. Snakes are plentiful and cobra haunt the bamboo forests. There is a large variety of fish. The best fish in size and quality is the plantain fish.

## Meteorology and Climate

132 Coorg is a small country, and yet its high mountain ridges and narrow valleys, its wood-clad hill slopes and open champaign tracts greatly influence its atmospheric conditions. Still the dry eastern district may present as steady a climate as the moist hilly tract along the Ghats or the Mercara plateau. The hot, rainy and cold seasons have to be distinguished. Throughout the year the atmosphere is humid, and humidity is precipitated either in dense mists or in showers of rain. In July the monsoon reaches its greatest vehemence. The Coorg hills send the floods controlled by steep river banks to the east and west and stand forth in renewed beauty. In September the sun breaks through the dense atmosphere. In November the north-east winds carry heavy clouds from the eastern coast which discharge themselves chiefly in the east and south-east of Coorg. The greater part of December is foggy, but towards the end of the month the weather becomes delightfully clear and fresh. The annual rainfall at Mercara is 133 inches. On the whole, the influence of the Coorg climate with its average temperature of 60° F. is salubrious. The nights are cool throughout the year.

## Prehistory

172 Our knowledge of the prehistory of Coorg is very scanty. Prehistoric dolmens or burial cairns are found in Coorg as in other parts of South India. The first discovery of them in large numbers was made by Lieut. Mackenzie in 1868 on Bane near Virajpet. Captain Cole followed it up with great enthusiasm and his excavations yielded interesting results. All the cairns found are either level with the ground, or their tops crop just a little out of it. When laid bare, they present a stone chamber 7 ft. x 4 ft. x 5 ft. composed of four upright granite slabs, 7 or 8 inches thick, and a capstone which projects over the uprights. The flooring is likewise of stone. The narrow front slab has an aperture of an irregular curve nearly 2 ft. in diameter broken out from the top and generally faces east. Sometimes a compartment may be two-chambered. These cairns are either

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solitary or in groups, in some cases forming regular rows. The relics found in them are peculiarly shaped pottery, buried in the earth that nearly fills the chambers. The vessels contain earth, sand, bones, iron spear-heads and beads. The pottery consists of chatties and urns of burnt clay and is of a lead or black colour. They are smooth and shining and can hardly be said to be glazed. Bones, ashes and bits of charcoal are usually found at the bottom of the urns; grains of ragi have also been found inside the chambers. Beads of red cornelian of a cylindrical shape are occasionally met with in the smaller pottery. The iron implements, spears, and arrow heads are very much corroded so that their shape is hardly distinguishable. These cairns apparently were the resting places of the earthly remains of a generation that existed anterior to the historical records of the present local races. The dolmens are also called pandu-kuzhies or dwellings of the Pandus by the Coorgs. 172

## Traditional History

The early history of Coorg is based primarily on Puranic legends and surmises covering a period of over ten centuries. The three names, Brahmakshetra, Matsyadesa and Kroda-Desa are applied to Coorg. The Puranic account is found in the *Cauvery Mahatmya*. It describes the origin of the Cauvery, and the place from which it arises. 173

According to *Cauvery Mahatmya*, the Coorgs are Ugras by descent, that is the offspring of a Kshatriya father and a Sudra mother. The Kshatriya was a Kadamba prince of the Matsya country and known as Chandravarma. He was very religious by nature, and after a long pilgrimage to holy shrines in the south he came to Brahmagiri and propitiated the goddess Parvati, who bestowed on him a kingdom there and provided him with a Sudra wife by whom he had eleven sons. She also promised to bless the country by appearing in it as the river Cauvery. The sons brought up as Kshatriyas in their turn obtained as wives the three hundred daughters born of Sudra mothers to the king of Vidarbha (Berar). Chandravarma having crowned his eldest son Devakanta as successor, took leave of him, predicting that Cauvery would soon appear as the river. These sons had more than a hundred sons each, and they spread themselves all over the country. This tearing up of the ground was like the work of boars, and the country was therefore called Kroda-Desa or boar-country from which arose the name Kodagu.

There is another popular legend which throws some light on the early history of the Coorgs. In former times there lived in Malabar six brothers and a sister. Five of them accompanied by their sister, Ponnan-galathamma, went to Coorg by the Peddoregghat. While they were on the road, four of them said, "How is it that our sister comes with us!

173 The people will say that she is our wife." One of them replied, "If she comes with us, we will spoil her caste." When they came to Chouripade hill near the Kakabi river, they felt hungry. Then Iguttappa asked her (the sister) to prepare some food. She replied that there was neither rice nor fire. Iguttappa said, "I will give you rice, but you must eat it without salt". The brothers agreed to this. Then she saw a cow, which belonged to the Paredandra house, and she milked her, allowing the milk to fall into an earthern pot full of rice. While her brothers were sleeping in the shade of a tree, she went to the bank of the river and buried the pot in the sand, when it began to boil. She then summoned her brothers to partake of the rice she had prepared. When they had partaken enough, Iguttappa took some rice, threw it into the air and exclaimed, "See how the hail is descending from this sky." The sister was incensed at this act. She took a wooden ladle, gave him a heavy blow, and said, "See how the thunder breaks in the monsoon." The other brothers then laughed at this. While they were sitting together chewing betel, Palurappa said, "Let us see whose betel is reddest." All spat out the betel in their hand, pretending that they were throwing it again into their mouth and chewing. Deluded by this act, the sister threw the betel into her mouth and began to chew. They then declared that she had lost her caste. This decision was confirmed by their brother in Malabar to whom they appealed. Their sister felt very sorry and wept very bitterly. Iguttappa then threw an arrow from Iguttappabetta and directed his sister to follow the direction of the arrow and stay where it fell. Assuming the shape of a crane, she flew towards Ponnanjale. Some Holeyas were working in paddy fields near Karathandra house. She flew upon one of them who became possessed with the devil and ran towards the tree to which the arrow had stuck. The brothers separated into different villages where they settled down. The whole family was afterwards worshipped as gods. Beyturappa had a temple at Beytur in Malabar. The third has one in Maletambira forest in Chomamale in Coorg, the fourth on the Iguttappa hill near Kunjila, the fifth at Palur in Kuyanjarinad, and the sixth Tirnalli-Timmeya at Tirnally in Wynad. A temple was built for Ponnanjalatamma round the tree where the arrow struck. At her annual feast in April, she weeps and is worshipped by the Holeyas. The arrow is seen sticking to the wild mango tree to this day.

174 The foregoing traditional accounts go to show that the Coorgs
173 belong to the Ugra race and are the descendants of prince Chandraverma. The first colonists are made out to have migrated from the Kadamba kingdom. Lewis Rice says that it is a conclusion as well consistent with what is known of the Kadamba history as corroborated by the modern annals of Coorg, and with the fact that every dynasty of its Rajas derived their origin from the same region. There are also other traditions which lend

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support to the same view. They are narrated in the tales of the adventures of Chandrasekara and Chitrasekara, as expounded by Professor Wilson. They point to the fact that the kings of Jumcha and Coorg were of the same race. It is also observed that the aborigines as represented by the Holeyas were their forerunners in Coorg.

## Population

The population of Coorg is composed of the following tribes and castes:—

1. Yerava
2. Kuruba
3. Mal Kudiya
4. Holeya
5. Coorg
6. Bant
7. Gauda
8. Heggade
9. Vokkaliga

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## CHAPTER VII

# COORG

101 174 COORG was primarily inhabited by two distinct communities, the Yeravas and the Coorgs. The Yeravas are the modern representatives of the original inhabitants of Coorg who retired to the hills before the southward march of the Aryans and other communities and sought asylum there from aggressive invaders. At a later time, the Coorgs found in the jungles the means of satisfying their hunting propensities while the narrow passes afforded ample scope for their highly developed instincts to carry on their predatory excursions into the country of their wealthier and less warlike neighbours. Even now their fighting and sporting qualities reveal themselves in their socio-religious ceremonies. Their peculiar features are the product of their environment which stimulated a special type of culture among them. The hilly character of the country shielded them from aggression and conquest.

### Origin and Early History

141 174 Sir Thomas Holland describes the Coorgs as the finest race without any exception in Southern India and considers them as even superior to the Brahmans in respect of skin colour, stature and prominence of the nose. They are taller than the Yeravas, have a finer nose, and have a larger head with a distinct tendency towards brachycephalism. Their average cephalic index is 80.6. Dr. Hutton states that " it appears to be a much simpler and more satisfactory view to regard the brachycephalic stock as preceding the Aryans. We may suppose them to have entered into the Indus Valley during the Mohenja Daru period and to have extended down to the west coast as far as Coorg forming the physical basis of several of the brachycephalic or mesatocephalic castes of Western India."

174 Coorg inscriptions hardly throw any light on the early history of the Coorgs. They show that the province was successively connected with the Ganga dynasty, the Hoysala kings, the Nayaks of Belur, and the Lingayat Rajas of Coorg, as also with those of the Bednur family. It is said that new settlers must have been introduced into the province under various governments. This conjecture is supported by the Kaveri Purana, in its account of Matsyadesa, the Puranic name of Coorg. The Coorg Rajas were themselves aliens to the country and were Lingayats, while the Coorgs were the followers of ancestor-worship. They were the most numerous in the north-west of the province, where they were closely allied to the Mysoreans. In Padinalkanad, the Malayalam element was predominant. Wynad which once formed part of Coorg must have afford-

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ed a passage to the immigrants from Malabar. From the above facts, it may be gathered that they were not an unmixed race. The house names of some of the Coorg families indicate Mysore, Tulu or Tamil origin. Their language, demon and ancestor-worship do tend to show that they belong to the Dravidian. Their traits are biologically useful and related to mental capacity and intellectual endowment. Their mountain habitat, climate, food and occupation are responsible for what they are at present, and these factors have differentiated them from the people of the plains.

## Habitation

The Coorg houses are like those of the Nayars of Kerala. They are situated by the side of their paddy fields on a sheltering slope of Bane-land, surrounded by plantain trees, bastard sago, orange, jack and mango trees. A coffee garden and a small plot of land for the growth of vegetables are not absent on the Hittelmandala land. There is a small pond well stocked with fish. The position and type of building bear an analogy to those of the Nayars of Kerala. The approaches to the Coorg house strongly mark the design of fortification, and tradition goes back to a time of general feuds, when chief fought against chief and clan with clan. Deep trenches with high embankments are visible memorials to the warlike state of affairs in days gone by. These trenches intersect the mountainous district in every direction.

A deeply cut passage paved with rough stones and overgrown with shady trees, its sloping side walls decked with a variety of ferns, leads one in angular lines to a doorway passing under an outhouse. Houses are located in the midst of their plantations remote from the public gaze. A paved courtyard is surrounded by stables, store rooms, and servants' quarters, in front of which is the main quadrangular building which has one storey and is raised about three feet from the ground. All the buildings are roofed with bamboo and thatched with rice straw which is annually repaired and renewed. There is an open square hall in the centre known as batte or nandumane, the four sides of which are provided with rooms for the inmates to occupy. In front of the building there is an open verandah which is the reception hall. It is raised and covered with a wooden plank almirah two or three feet broad, so as to form convenient seats for the male members and visitors. From it rise three or four wooden pillars square, round and tapering, and sometimes carved. The floor is well beaten with mud and cleaned with cowdung. The ceiling is of wood, arranged in small compartments. In some, the verandah is separated from the inner hall by a wall with a sort of window or lattice made of wood. It is a contrivance intended for the benefit of the Coorg women who are curious to see visitors. On the right side of the verandah there is a main

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A View of a Coorg House and its sylvan environment

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A Front View of a Coorg House

[facing p. 40]

342 door leading into the inner hall which is lit by the skylight formed by the junction of the four slopes of the inner roof into an inner space (mittam) which is a masonry reservoir in which rain water is collected and drained off by an underground passage. The inner roof is supported on four pillars, [352] resting on thick board slabs of jackwood upon the walls of the reservoir, and forming convenient seats for the inmates of the house, the inner rooms of which are without windows and open by small doors into the central hall only. On the side diagonally opposite to the door of the verandah, and likewise on the inner right corner, there are two doors leading to the exterior of the house. The first room of the house is occupied by the master of the house and his wife. The next room is the kitchen-dining room whence the smoke issues and fills the hole house, coating and preserving the woodwork. The small rooms of the remaining two wings are [778] tenanted by the married couples, the widows and unmarried women. One room near the left corner is set apart as sacred to the family deity. From the ceiling are suspended match-locks, the wooden bells for cattle, the trappings of pack bullocks, and other domestic utensils. The space under the [353] roof and above the wooden ceiling, which is covered with a thick layer of [312] earth to keep the rooms below dry and fireproof, serves for storing bags of [343] rice, baskets, pots and culinary provisions. There is also a deep well built with stone in the compound to supply water for cooking purposes, and another hut by the side of the paddy fields for bathing in hot water.

352 The simplicity of the habits of the Coorgs is reflected in the furniture that they use. Wooden cots are generally used, with straw, coir, or cotton mattresses and cushions, sheets, and blankets; on the floor, they have coarse mats for rubbing their feet before going to bed. Occasionally they use wooden stools. A wooden shelf is fixed to the wall in each room to keep [415] their brass vessels, plates and lamps. Rattan or wooden boxes contain their [854] clothing and jewels. There is always a spittoon in one corner of the room. [777] Where there is a baby, a rattan cradle is suspended from the ceiling within reach of the mother's bed. Young Coorgs of the present day have better houses and good furniture as also comfortable arrangements in the European style.

### Internal Structure

619 The Coorgs are composed of four endogamous groups, Amma, Sanna Malla and Boddu Coorgs. The Amma and Sanna Coorgs are found in all parts of Coorg. The Malla and Sanna Coorgs are united and are no longer distinguishable. They form the principal class of Coorgs.

### Exogamy

614 The Coorg clans are too many to mention. Most of them are their local house names. Some are alien. Marriage within the clan is prohibited.

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A Coorg Male Group

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A Coorg Married Couple

[facing p. 41]

## Marriage Customs and Ceremonies

The marriage customs of the Coorgs are a curious medley of old and new rites, fashions and notions. Formerly, their marriage customs had a communal character. On an auspicious day, a family would call together the whole village, comprising all the families of the rice valleys occupying farm houses, for a feast. The youths would have their ears pierced by the village carpenters to wear ear-rings, and the maidens had rice strewn over their heads. This was called the marriage feast. The whole community feasted together and the younger people were at liberty to go in search of husbands and wives. This communal character has now changed. Young men express their desire to marry to their parents, grandparents, or the senior members of the family, who look out for suitable girls not in any way related to them. All consanguinous unions are prohibited. Among the prohibitions are:

(i) The descendants of the father's side of the same family name.

(ii) The descendants of the mother's sisters.

(iii) Paternal or maternal uncles or aunts.

A friend of each of the contracting parties becomes the intermediary or Aruva and he is the master of the ceremonies. The father of the young man or his elder brother with the Aruva goes to the house of the young woman, where their advent is expected. On a favourable response, the whole house is well swept and cleaned, and a lamp is lit, when the Aruvas on both sides with prominent members of respectable families stand before it, facing each other, and shake hands in token of the inviolable contract having been concluded. Such betrothals are seldom broken. If the bridegroom dies before consummation of the marriage, the bride becomes a widow. She is then entitled to an inheritance and sustenance in the bridegroom's family, and may enter into conjugal relations with his brother or first cousins.

The Coorg weddings generally take place in April and May, when the rice fields are dry and there is little to do. The day for the wedding is fixed in consultation with the local astrologer, and invitations are sent by the Aruvas to the relations of the bride and bridegroom, to the married Coorgs of the same village, to friendly neighbours of other castes, or even to Muhammadans.

On the wedding day at about 9 a.m. the invited guests assemble in festive array at the houses of the bride and bridegroom, and while the women go to the inside of the house and give a helping hand to the mistress, the men are accommodated in the spacious verandah or in temporary sheds in the courtyard and served with pansupari to assist the flow of village

585 gossip, which is now and then broken by the noisy band of musicians.
574 Meanwhile, the bride and bridegroom are bathed, he is dressed in his new
292 kuppasam (coat) with a long red cotton or silk sash round his waist and
[301] his friends fasten into it the new pichathi, a present from his father,
[405] together with a watch, and put jewelled gold rings on his fingers and a carefully tied turban in the approved Coorg fashion. A bright coloured handkerchief thrown over his shoulder completes his dress. The bride who is fully decked is left to the care of her friends.

585 In the bridegroom's house the wedding party proceed to the kaymada,
[782] carrying a light which had been kindled at the sacred house lamp, and
[354] ignite an earthen lamp there and invoke the blessings of the ancestors. On returning to the house the principal members of the family enter first into the inner hall, and the younger men follow and offer their customary salutations. At the auspicious hour, the bridegroom seeks the permission of the master of the house, and the elders to seat himself on the low three-legged stool kept in readiness and placed upon a carpet between two lighted lamps. These lamps trimmed with many wicks stand in metal dishes filled with rice by the side of which is a spouted brass vessel with milk. On the bridegroom being seated, the master of the house takes a handful of rice and strews it over his head and shoulders uttering the words, "Live well; and
585 prosper well by God's favour", gives him a sip of milk, and drops a piece
431 of money or other present in his lap, and passes on. Four men closely related to him do likewise. Then five of the nearest female relations
[576] including the mistress of the house repeat the same formalities. Then the guests, male and female, do the same. Old people only touch the bridegroom's shoulder, those of equal age shake hands, while those below touch his feet as a mark of respect. As the presents accumulate, they are taken
[589] care of by a friend who sits near him and watches what and by whom they
[707] are given. Widowers and widows do not take part in the proceedings because they are unlucky.

585 The same ceremony is gone through in the bride's house at about the same time, but women have precedence over men. After this ceremony, the bridegroom rises and takes his meal with a group of twelve of the nearest relations (groomsmen) and the Aruva. The guests who are
[674] invited are sumptuously fed in the leafy shed put up for the occasion.
[533] Various kinds of liquor are served. During and after feasting, the music makes a discordant and deafening noise.

After feasting, the bridegroom's party go to the bride's house, which is generally some miles away. On such occasions a Coorg bridegroom, mounted on a pony, dismounts at the gate of the bride's residence which he approaches barefooted. When he has advanced

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within the gate, men hold upright the stems of a plantain tree with the leaves on them. A large broad Coorg war-knife is put into his hand, and he has to cut through a plantain stem with one blow. Three chances are allowed to him. It is clear that the possession of physical strength has always been regarded as an essential requisite in a suitor, and the survival of this custom is a safeguard against the premature marriage of children which prevails elsewhere. The bride's party come to meet them there and some of their servants bring chairs and mats along with refreshments. Both parties with the united efforts of the musicians advance to the house. The bridegroom is received by his parents-in-law. After the customary salutations, refreshments of pansupari are freely sent round. Then a meal is served and enjoyed with liberal potations. The bride is conducted by her maids over an outspread cloth into the bridal chamber, where she is seated on a low stool. The bridegroom's party approach her and repeat the ceremony of rice throwing which was performed at noon by the bride's relations. At last the bridegroom who is seated on a low stool all along is conducted to the bridal chamber, and is seated by the right side of the bride who with bent heads sits veiled all over. Soon he rises and strews rice over her and gives her some milk to sip, but speaks nothing. He then presents her with a small bag containing a silver or gold ring, a gold coin for her puttakku or necklace, and some silver coins. Then both eat together for the first time, being served by some women of the household. After this wedding meal the young couple have the exchange of looks and words. The bridegroom grasps her hand and leads her out of the house, and this act of possession constitutes the essential part of the ceremony. He then returns home with his wife accompanied by his party. If the house is distant, the young wife with her maids are conveyed in a bullock cart. If it is nearer, she is conducted by her two best friends. The mother of the bridegroom or the mistress of the house welcomes and conducts her to her own room and gives her refreshments. The guests are treated to a feast after which they take leave of the host. Aruva and ten married Coorgs of their nearest kin remain behind. The members of the family along with them assemble round the sacred lamp, when the Aruva gives some homely advice about the duties and privileges of a married Coorg. Hearing this, the bridegroom grasps her right hand and goes with her towards the door, but as he steps outside, she remains within. Her relations now form two rows in front of the door, and the Aruva of the bride tells the Aruva of the bridegroom, "You have desired Puraka from us Mandanna. We have given her, and now ask you, "Has she any claim on Mandanna's property, house and yard, field and jungle, gold and silver, if she becomes his wife?" The bridegroom's Aruva says, "Puraka has a lawful claim on Mandanna's property." This is repeated thrice, and as a typical pledge of possession, like the 'katti jamma fee' on the investment with land, the bridegroom's Aruva hands over to that of the bride's family

585 three pebbles which he binds to the hem of her garment. This is a token of sealing her right to her husband's property. The bridegroom then takes the bride by the hand and leads her out of the house. This act of possession forms the principal part of the ceremony.

[576] As a mark of respect, he makes his obeisance to those assembled by touching their feet. In like manner, the wife fetches a pot of water from the well to the kitchen and carries a basket of manure to the nearest field and then returns to her room to indicate her willingness to share in the labours of the house. The Aruva then takes the bridegroom to the room [551] of his wife, and thenceforth, while she remains in his house as his wife, [583] she bears a new name, but will always be called by a familiar one under the parental roof. The married daughter receives from her parents a certain dowry and a good bed, but thenceforth she has no claim on the family property.

585 178 In bygone days, there was a custom of so called cloth marriage. Kittel writes that a man gave a cloth to a girl, and she, accepting it, became his wife without any further ceremonies. He might dismiss her at any time [586] without being under the least obligation of providing either for her or the children born during connection. The custom was abolished by one of the [643] Lingayat Rajas, who being unable to obtain as many girls for his harem as he wished from wanton selfishness put a stop to it.

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## CHAPTER VIII

# COORG (Contd.)

IN the absence of a male issue in a house, a daughter is retained and married to a Coorg on condition that the children born are considered as the children of the wife's, and not of the husband's house. Such a husband may have another wife with children in his own house, and these have no share in the property of the other wife. Polygamy is not forbidden, but is seldom practised 858 857 595

It is worthy of note that the Coorgs have no priest to preside over the wedding ceremony. There are no religious functions such as those prevailing among the higher Hindu castes. There are some magical acts, which are related here. The bride's hand is grasped in order that she may be delivered into the hands of her husband. She eats with him on the wedding day to create community of life. Marriage ceremonies in all stages of culture are intended to neutralise the dangers and to make the union safe, prosperous and happy. It referred to the permanent joint life of man and woman, and the essence of the union is the joining together of the bridal pair. The practice of throwing rice may have originated in the idea of giving food to the evil influences to induce them to be propitious and to depart It is considered as a token of blessing. In many cases, it seems to have developed into a sympathetic mode of fertility. At one stage of the wedding, the bride veiled approaches the husband, and they see each other. These ideas may explain the origin of the bridal veil. Besides there is sexual shyness, and the ideas associated with women that these are dangerous as well as improper, and so they lead to effeminacy. Accordingly, the bride spends the wedding days with her girl friends and the bridegroom with young men who in the marriage institution are respectively called bridesmaids and groomsmen. 585 [793]

### Polyandry

It has been observed that, in warlike races, the clannish feeling and family spirit often predominate over and absorb individual consciousness and personal rights. Among the Coorgs, family property descends not from father to son, as from generation to generation the eldest member acts as the head of the house. In olden times, the Coorgs are said to have lived in a state of general warfare, chief against chief, and Nadu against Nadu. As a relic of that age, the deep trenches which to this day are found intersecting the country in all directions may be considered. In such an age, destruction of life must have been great. But it was of course the male community that principally suffered in the turmoil. The people must soon 174 726 595 [428]

[74 have been exterminated under such a state of affairs. But if the surviving
726 brothers were to become the rightful husbands of the widows, a second and
595 an undiminished generation might in time take the place of the fallen. In more recent times, the Rajas used to keep a large number of armed men constantly in attendance on themselves. They were absent from home for weeks and months. On their return, their brothers would have to go to the Palace or accompany the Raja on some hunting or fighting expedition. The brothers at home would then take the place of the absent from home [428] and family. It is clear that the law of inheritance by the sister's son is unknown among the Coorgs. This, according to Richter, affords the strongest proof that polyandry is no Coorg custom.

### Widow Marriage

587 Widows may remarry. Should any of the deceased husband's brothers choose to marry her, he may do so or she may be married to any other man. By doing so, she acquires the rights of the second husband and relinquishes all interest in her late husband's property, but not in her children. A second marriage is celebrated in a quiet manner and only the nearer relatives and some of the villagers are invited to the marriage feast. The strewing of rice and other ceremonies are dispensed with. After the removal of signs of widowhood, the bride appears in the apparel of married life.

### Divorce

586 A man can divorce an unfaithful wife, but a wife has no remedy against her husband in case of his faithlessness. The Takkas, the Aruva of the house, the Takkas of the village, and some members of the wife's family with her Aruva meet in the hall of the husband's house, when as at betrothal the lamp is put between them; and the Aruva solemnly relinquishes the wife's claim to the husband's property. The children remain in the father's house and the unhappy woman returns with all her belongings to the parental roof. It has to be stated to the credit of Coorg women that such events are very rare.

### Pregnancy and Childbirth

844 A woman's first confinement takes place at her mother's house whither she returns after the seventh month of pregnancy. There are no professional midwives among them. The women of the household who have
846 experience for their guidance render all the assistance. A few hours after birth she is bathed in very hot water, and with the abdomen well bound up, she is brought to bed in a lying posture in the best room of the house. This practice is quite at variance with what prevails among other Hindus [783] who relegate a woman in childbirth to an outhouse. Though the period of pollution lasts for seven days, a woman enjoys immunity from all house-

hold duties for 60 days to recover her normal health, and devote herself to her baby. During this period she daily bathes in hot water after having been well rubbed with castor oil before a charcoal fire. The robust health of a Coorg woman is no doubt due to the care taken by them during pregnancy and confinement.

### Naming Ceremony

As soon as a Coorg boy is born, a little bow of a castor oil plant stick with an arrow made of a leaf stalk of the same plant is put into his little hands and a gun is fired in the courtyard. He is thus at taking his first breath introduced into the world as a future hunter and warrior. This ceremony is not generally now observed. On the twelfth day after birth, the child is laid into a cradle by the mother or grandmother who gives the name, which in many instances is well sounding and significant. Boys are known by Belliappah, Ponnappa, Mandanna and girls Puvakka, Muthakka and Chinnamma. The Coorg women are very prolific and bear children to the extent of ten or twelve. In cases of necessity a wet-nurse is employed, but infanticide is not practised.

### Family

The Coorg family is of the patriarchal type. It is the domicile of all male relatives and their children belonging to one parental stock. Two or three generations, grandfather, grandmother, their sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and other children numbering from 20 to 60 or even more in some cases, all live and mess together. The labourers who were once their slaves belong to the family and depend on their mistress for food and orders. So long as there is peace and harmony, a Coorg family is a fine example of the patriarchal type. Every domestic affair of importance can be undertaken only with the consent of the senior member. He is expected to look after the principal needs of the family and its members individually and check irregularities of all kinds by sound discipline. The nature and extent of his control may be gathered from the fact that married sons and their wives choose their residence under the paternal roof to avoid the responsibility of a separate establishment. The senior female member is the queen of the household, and holds a corresponding position among the junior members and their wives and daughters. The peace and harmony of the family that once prevailed may be marred by discord, by the harsh treatment of an imperious mother-in-law, by the jealousy and heart-burnings of the married members of the material questions affecting the family income and individual claims. The senior member who is the Karnavan of the family has no easy position under such circumstances. The domestic life under normal circumstances is brightened by the affection of the children for their parents and relatives, and the little ones, of whom there is generally a good number, are in turn great pets of the family. The bearing of the young in the presence of the old is decorous, but the grown-up members are not

596 generally well guarded in the use of proper expressions in their talk with the young. The educated men of the present day exercise a potent influence for good in the normal conversation, and show due respect to their [607] brother's wife with whom no familiarity is allowed. There is a tendency [178] at present among the discontented members to break up the ancestral family [578] by a division of the family property among the members.

### Property and Disposal

423 The property of the Coorgs consists chiefly of the ancestral house
425 and the land belonging to it which under the Rajas was held on a feudal
177 tenure and on a light assessment termed *jamma bhumi* or birthright land, because it was inalienably vested in the family or house, and the British Government confirmed the settlement. Additional land was taken up by them on the *sagu* tenure, but, in course of time, Government allowed to some extent such *sagu* land to be converted into *jamma* land. Other land held as jagir was granted for certain Government service as *umbli* land on a light assessment. During the last thirty years, many houses have opened out coffee plantations on their own or Govern-
434 ment land, or rented cardamom jungles. Thus the actual wealth of the
421 Coorgs consists of landed property and their prosperity depends on the
596 exertions and means of cultivation; but imprudent enterprises and un-
[556] expected reverses have caused much embarrassment. Formerly, all the members of a Coorg house lived together in the ancestral home or in some outfarm, *koppu*, neither of which could be alienated nor subdivided among the members of the family. All of them worked for the common good under the management of the *yajamana* or *korakara*, and had their subsistence on the proceeds. Any surplus on the annual reckoning became
[433] the property of the house for providing incidental expenditure on the occasion of marriages, funerals, and other ceremonies, as also for the purchase of new land in the interest of the family. If, however, an individual member by becoming a salaried officer or by coming into possession of money through marriage, was enabled to enter upon private speculation without any aid from the ancestral house, any property or acquirements thus made became his private property and were left at his own disposal by gift or will. Many young men have thus become
[591] separated from the ancestral house and established a new homestead, and as long as they contributed to the expenses of the former, they maintained
[182] their share in the proceeds. This is the proper mode of setting up a new house. Disintegration is now setting in, and some try to break up the ancestral houses by a division of the landed property among the members.

### Adoption

597 The right of adoption is given to every Coorg house in the absence of male issue, or by an unmarried man or woman or widower in order to secure the inheritance of personal property or rights.

### Kinship

The system of kinship among the Coorgs is of the type called classificatory. The most important feature is the use of the same kinship terms for mother's brother and father-in-law on the one hand and for father's sister and mother-in-law on the other. The fundamental feature of the system is the application of the same kinship terms in addressing most persons of the same generation and sex. 601

### Social Organization

The Coorgs have a council of elders called Takka Mukkyastam who act as the moral censors of their social affairs, though they are not invested with magisterial power by Government. The authority of the village Takkas extends over offences against social customs, non-attendance of public feasts, and improper conduct during the same, as for example, drunkenness. The offender has to appear before the village elders at the *ambala*, an open council room on the village green, where the matter is discussed. The presiding Takka pronounces the verdict which may amount to a fine of ten rupees. In the event of refusal to pay the amount, the offender may be excommunicated, when he may appeal to the district Takkas, and their decision is final. An outcaste Coorg may be reinstated on payment of the fine. The influence of the official class, and increasing knowledge of the law tend to subvert the authority of the Takkas, who relax their control by accommodating themselves to changed conditions, and do not venture on any excommunication. 623 692 [634] [178]

### Funeral Ceremonies

The Coorgs bury their dead. The common people are buried in the village burial ground, and children in some reserved place near the home. Men of importance have a tomb built over their graves with a masonry bull, the emblem of Siva, surrounding it. When a man dies, messages are sent round to every house of the village community. Each house must at least send one male and one female member to render service on the occasion. The Aruva of the family has the direction of affairs of the ceremonies. Under his direction the corpse is washed and dressed by the man who has followed the funeral summons, if the deceased is a man, but if a woman, by the women. The handling of the dead by the funeral party does not ceremonially defile them. It is enough for them to bathe and change clothes on reaching home. The corpse is then carried to the hall and laid on a funeral bed near to which a lighted lamp is placed. The whole company gather round and break out in loud lamentations, beating the breast and tearing the hair. Guns are also fired in honour of the dead. Towards evening, the corpse is brought into the yard in an open bier, a little water is poured into its mouth by the relatives and a piece of money is deposited in a copper dish, containing a little coconut milk, saffron, rice 764 [203] [431]

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Coorgs in National Costume

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A Village Takka (headman)

[facing p. 50]

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764 and well water. The corpse is then carried to the burial ground. Each
[431] funeral attendant approaches, dips his finger in the copper dish, moistens the lips of the corpse with a drop or two and lays a piece of money in it. This collection goes to meet the funeral expenses. After all present have taken leave of the departed, the body is divested of its best clothes and ornaments, and decently laid into the grave or on the pile, the contents of the funeral
[783] lamp dish are thrown upon it, and the covering of the grave or the burning of the pile concludes the ceremony. Pollution lasts for eleven days. In the case of a husband's funeral, the widow with two of her own and relative's children, carrying a brass vessel and a coconut, brings an earthen pot full of water and carries it round the corpse thrice on the funeral ground, the coconut is broken and its water put into a dish for the purpose already mentioned, the widow standing near the feet of the corpse and with averted face lets the earthen water pot fall sideways from her shoulder to the ground as a symbol of her shattered happiness, and the Aruva breaks the brass bangles on her wrist. The next morning the relatives remove her
[765] garments, but her hair remains. As a mark of mourning, a woman leaves
[589] off wearing for one year her kerchief on the head and ties it round her neck. While in this state of widowhood, she neither wears bangles, nor necklace, nor ear-ornaments.

765 On the twenty-eighth day or some time later, as late as six months, when due honour is intended for the departed, a final ceremony, the Thithi, is performed. In the interval the relatives who offer themselves for this service undergo some fasting. They forego the early and the second meal. At noon they bathe, prepare their own simple food, eat part of it themselves, and give the rest to the crows, which consume it for the dead. When the Thithi, the great day of the conclusion of funeral rites, arrives, the whole village community is again invited to the feast in honour of the departed and for the repose of the soul which ceremony concludes the funeral rites.

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A Coorg Temple (Kaymada)

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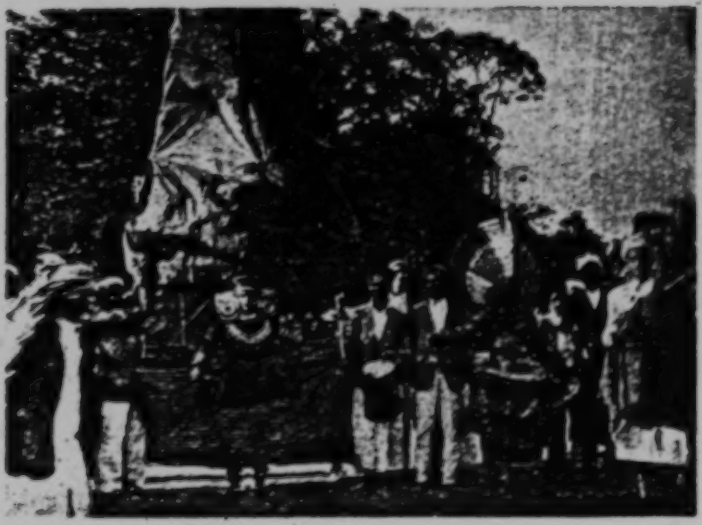

A Ghost Mask (Kernakola)

[facing p. 51]

[P 51]

## CHAPTER IX

## COORG (Contd.)

THE worship of the demons and ancestor-spirits constitutes the religion of the Coorgs. They have been influenced by contact with the Malayali, Canarese, Brahmanical and Lingayat superstitions. The Malayalis have made themselves indispensable at their demon and ancestor worship. The Tulus are their Pujaris. The worship of Mariamman (the smallpox demon) was introduced by the Mysoreans. The domiciled Brahmans of Coorg have succeeded in the introduction of Mahadeva and Subrahmania, and have temples erected and idols set up for worship. The Lingayats or Sivachars are also endeavouring to introduce the worship of Linga. Since the days of Vira Rajendra, Christianity was introduced in Coorg, and there is a Roman Catholic Settlement with a fine church at Virajpet, but Christianity has not made much headway in Coorg. 771 776 177 [797]

### Ancestor-Worship

The ancestor-worship of the Coorgs is based on the belief that the spirits of the dead hover inside and outside the Coorg dwellings and cause endless trouble in the absence of adequate propitiation. Each Coorg house has a *Kaimatta* (a building close at hand) under a tree in the fields or in the yard close to the house. This is a raised mud platform where carved stones representing the images of their ancestors are placed. Sacrifices of fowls and pigs are made to them. Sometimes the Coorgs become possessed of the spirits of the dead and express all their desires when they are sumptuously fed and given drink. The spirits of ancestors are believed to hand over their locality and become angry now and then. A male ghost is called *Karana*, and a female one *Sodalachi* or *Karanchi*. 769 [346] [782] [787]

It is a belief among the Coorgs that ghosts cause trouble, and females even more so. The Sodalachis are ever inclined to smite children with sickness and sometimes even the adult males and females of the house. In fact they are ever inclined to do harm. With a view to appease their wrath, rice, arrack, milk and other delicacies are offered on various occasions during the year to them. Once a month, a fowl or two are offered at the *Kaimatta* to please them. In such cases a member of the community becomes possessed. He then puts off his head dress and walks in front of the house in a state of trance. While in this condition, the members of the family appear before him to represent their grievances. He makes some incoherent utterances which are believed to be emanations from one of the ancestors who has not been propitiated with offerings. At once he is treated to meat and drink, and neighbours are allowed to come in and put questions to the possessed. These gifts are called *Karana Baruna*. 769 782 787

796 The Coorgs perform another ceremony called ghost-mask (*karanakola*)
769 with the object of finding out the particular wishes of the ghosts. It is
787 performed every second or third year and occasionally also every year. For this, the services of a Malayali performer, a Panikkan or Benna, are requisitioned. At night he puts on, one after the other, five or more different costumes to represent the number of ancestors especially remembered at the [534] time. Arrayed in these different costumes, he dances to the accompaniment of a drum beaten by his companions and behaves as if he were possessed by [782] the Coorg ghosts. After each kola or mask, he leaves the house with a fowl, a coconut, fried rice and other eatables, and some arrack, and offers them in the courtyard to a particular ghost. Various questions are put to him by the members of the family and by the neighbours while he is in a state of trance. The food given him during the trance is called *Karana Barani*. The masks having been finished, a pin especially fattened for the purpose is decapitated in front of the *Kaimatta* and then taken up to be given to the performer. The rest of the carcass and bodies of the fowls [782] decapitated are taken to the house. In the absence of a *Kaimatta*, the pig offering takes place at the *Karanakotta*. Women also behave likewise, when possessed by an ancestral spirit. While thus affected, they roll on the ground, but they do not give utterance to oracular responses. Some- [785] times sorcerers, Coorgs or aliens, are invited to exorcise the ghosts. With the recitations of certain formulae in loud voice, they resort to flagellation. If it proves ineffectual, offerings are given.

### Village Gods

776 Tradition has it that human sacrifices were offered in former times to
782 secure the blessings of Grama Devatas, Mariamma, Durga, and Bhadrakali, who are supposed to protect the villages or nads from all evil influences. These deities have their annual feasts among the Coorgs, but they pay special attention to Ajappa, Kaliat Ajappa, and Kuttamma in Kiggatnad, whose shrine is annually visited with gifts.

Every forest ground has its presiding deity to which an annual sacrifice or pork and cakes is offered. If it is not propitiated, the *Kadevaru*, the tending god, will withdraw his favour, and sickness and death among cattle will ensue. Besides, there are extensive forests called Devarukadu, which are untrodden by human foot and reserved for the abodes or hunting grounds of deified heroic ancestors.

### Serpent Worship

97
825 Traces of serpent worship or tree worship are found in Coorg. The *Natas* or spots on which cobras have finished their course of terrestrial life are the place of solemn ceremonies. To prevent any human being from putting foot on the hallowed spot, it is marked by a little stone enclosure.

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During the month of November, a lamp is lighted every evening to Nates, and coconuts are offered as oblations.

## Pilgrimage

The Coorgs go on pilgrimage to Irjatre at the foot of Lakshmana-tirtha fall in Kiggatnad after the Sivaratri in February or March, and on the Talai Kaveri Jatra to the source of the river Cauvery in October. Amongst the Jatra beyond their country, those visited by the Coorgs are four, Subramania on the northern frontier of Coorg in December, Baitur in Malabar, in February, and Nanjangudu in Mysore which comes off in December. In exceptional cases they go to Benares.

## Demon Worship

The Coorgs are demon worshippers because of the evil influences of certain malignant spirits, which can render their life more gloomy and wretched. The demons are called Kulis, who are believed to be capable of carrying away the souls of the dying members in a family. When any trouble arises in a house, and strange voices are believed to be heard in or near it, a *Kanya* (a Malabar astrologer) is consulted as to the cause of it, and he speaks of the influence of some *Kuli* who must have carried away the soul of somebody either in the house or in the neighbourhood. He suggests that a demon mask has to be performed for the liberation of the soul. It takes place once a year at Kutta, or at any other place once in two or three years.

The master of the house ties some money in a piece of cloth which is suspended from a rafter of the house as a pledge for the performance of the ceremony. Sometimes he ties his brass plate up there and eats his food on a plantain leaf as a vow. For the demon mask, either a Malayali magician or a true Ajjala Palya is sent for, and the ceremony is performed in the courtyard of the house owner. Demon masks are performed in the name of one or two of the five demons, Bhamundi, Kalluguti, Panjurli, Gulika and Goraka. The details of the ceremony are the same as those described for the exorcism of the ancestral spirits. The food of the performer in trance is called Kuli Barani. The liberation of the soul is thus effected. The demon that has thus committed the theft begs to leave the soul free. In the event of his refusal, the performer throws a handful of rice on the member of the house standing near him, and thus transfers the spirit to him. The spirit alights on his back, when he falls in a swoon, and is soon carried away by others into the house. The final act of a demon mark is the decapitation of pigs in front of the so called *kuzhikota* or demon abode. It may be near to or far away from the house or village. Fowls are sacrificed upon it. One pig suffices for house affair, but several pigs are required when a whole village is involved. The heads are given to the performers, and the trunks supply the house or village diviner.

**Festivals: (1) Huttari**

243 746 527 The Huttari is the feast of first fruits. The name is said to be derived from the Malayalam 'pudiyari', or new rice. It occurs at full moon at the end of November or beginning of December. After various preliminary ceremonies, the person chosen to cut the first sheaves goes at sunset to the fields in procession with a lighted torch in a dish of rice [415] carried before him. He has a sickle in one hand and a bamboo bottle of fresh milk in the other. He cuts the sheaf and distributes the stalk to those present, and puts some into the milk. This is carried in procession to the [534] house, the people shouting, "Poli, poli, Deva", that is, "Increase, increase, O God," followed by a blast of the shrill Coorg brass horn. It is truly a national and thanksgiving feast entirely uninfluenced by Brahmanism. It [535] lasts for seven days. It begins with village rejoicings and extends to Nad [533] or district gatherings, and ends every day with the peculiar cane dance of [526] the men and boys to the tune of the most melancholy and monotonous sound of horns, drums and songs. Other games vary the proceedings, but the most interesting part is always the champion fight in playful dance, which often ends in a general skirmish in which the canes are freely used.

**(2) Kaylmurtha**

527 The Kaylmurtha is the festival of arms celebrated by the youths and men of Coorg sometime in August. When the hard labours of ploughing, sowing, and transplanting of rice are over, a break in the monsoon spreads its bright light and sunny warmth over the hills and [711] dales, forests and fields in Coorg, when a holiday is most welcome. The Takka of the grama calls some respectable men to accompany him to the astrologer's home. They ascertain the most propitious day for the celebration of the festival.

[411] On the morning of the joyous day, the whole armoury of the house is placed in the verandah, gun and spear, bow and arrow, sword and knife. Some of the young men sit down to burnish the familiar weapons. When this is done, they are carried to a room or central hall, where they are [782] placed in a corner. When the auspicious moment arrives incense is burnt before the weapons, sandal paste is dotted on them in profusion, and a show offering, *Nivedya*, is offered to them and the idols. As soon as the festival is over, the whole house sits down to dinner. The men then [526] proceed with their arms to the village green, *ura-mandu*, to spend the afternoon in shooting at a mark and in athletic sports. The following day is devoted to a hunt in the forest belonging to the village. This is followed by a great hunt of the whole Nadu. It is a repetition of the village hunt on a larger scale. Whatever game is obtained, the man who killed the [533] animal receives a hind quarter and the head. The rest goes to the company. The Kaylmurtha is the most glorious of all festivities to the young Coorgs,

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and the popular song of the Coorg mountaineer does full justice to this sentiment.

### (3) Bhagavathi Feast

The Bhagavathi feast has been introduced by the Tulu Brahmins. It takes place two months preceding the monsoon. It is connected with demoniacal possessions, and extends over nine days. Tantri Brahmins, Coorgs and Holeyas have their share in the feast, and votaries disport themselves in their orgies in as noisy a manner as the Ajjala Palyas. The chief object of the feast is the collection of votive offerings to Tantri Brahmins who are an object of dread to the Coorgs.

### (4) Devasthana

The Coorg Devasthanas are rude village shrines of mud walls and thatched roof within a gloomy grove. The only ones deserving notice are those at Bhagamandala, Palur, Irupu and Omkareswara Devasthana at Mercara, the latter of which is built in the same Moorish style as the Rajas' tombs.

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# CHAPTER X

## COORG (Contd.)

241 THE principal occupation of the Coorgs is agriculture. Wet land cultivation predominates, but cultivation in dry and high lands is also made for the maintenance of large united families with numerous dependents. Agriculture is of a rude type and is similar to that prevailing in other parts of India. It is a system of rural economy formed at a remote period and transmitted for ages unchanged. Wedded to primitive modes of cultivation, the Coorg views with disapprobation any attempts at innovation. The industry of the people of the Highlands is confined exclusively to rice. The narrow valleys between the high grounds are very productive. The agricultural implements are of a rude type. And yet the yield has furnished an unfailing supply from ancient times both for consumption and for export to Malabar. Wherever practicable, the valleys have been 243 formed into flat terraces for cultivation.

782 [221] [394] The agricultural year begins about the middle of April. With the onset of the first showers in April or May, the ploughing commences. On an auspicious day before sunrise, the house lamp, *Tali-akki-baleke* (dish-rice-lamp) which plays a conspicuous role on all festive occasions, is lighted in the inner verandah, the members of the family assemble and invoke the blessings of their ancestors and Kaveri Amma. The young men make obeisance to their parents and elders and drive a pair of bullocks to the paddy fields, where they turn the heads of them to the east. The landlord now offers coconuts and plantains, rice and milk to the presiding deity of his Nad and lifting up his hands to the rising sun, he invokes his blessings. The oxen are yoked and three furrows are ploughed, when he takes a clod to the granary, and offers his prayers to Siva to grant him an increase of one hundred times. From 6 to 10 in the morning the ploughing is continued in the fields and turned two or three times. Then the borders are trimmed, the channels are cleaned, and the little banks repaired to regulate water.

243 [221] Regulated by the monsoon rain, the rice-transplanting takes place during July and August. The women covered with gorakes, which rest on the head and protect the whole body, pull out the plants from the nursery and tie them in small bundles which are collected in one spot. Meanwhile, the submerged fields are repeatedly ploughed and levelled, till the soil becomes [474] as soft as treacle. All the members of the family standing in a line knee deep in the muddy fields begin the transplanting. The bundles are conveniently deposited in the field, and each man takes a handful of plants at a time into his left hand, and presses into the mud with great rapidity seven or eight

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seedlings together, keeping a regular interval of six inches. Before the completion of the largest field, an open space of about ten feet wide is left throughout the whole length. This is the Coorg race-ground, offering good sport which greatly enlivens their monotonous work. From the men engaged in work, fifteen are selected for the race on 100 butties of land. Wearing a pair of short drawers they are eager for the run for which their strong legs qualify them. The signal is given and away they scramble, plunge, and stagger in deep mud, roars of laughter greeting the unfortunate persons who sink in. Having reached the opposite bank, they return in the same way struggling to the winning post. Four or five only win the race. The first-comer is rewarded with a piece of cloth, the second with a bunch of plantains, the third with a jack-fruit, the fourth with a bunch of oranges, and the fifth with parched rice. When all the fields are planted, a feast is given by the landlord.

As a protection against the evil eye, some half-burnt bamboos about six feet long are erected in a line through the middle of the fields. It is now the farmer's business to regulate the water supply of each field, and to fill up the holes made by crabs in the embankments. The weeding is then attended to and failures replanted. At the end of October, when the ears of corn are fully out, small huts on high posts are erected, one for every hundred butties, for the watchman who guards the crop against wild animals and at times fires a gun to scare them away. In November and December the paddy ripens, and the feast of the first fruits or Huttari is celebrated, after which the paddy may be reaped. The water is drained off the fields. The paddy is then cut down with a sickle close to the ground and then spread out to dry. After six or eight days it is bound into sheaves, carried home, and stacked in a heap, the ears turned inside. In January or February, chiefly in moonlit nights, the sheaves are taken to the threshing floor, spread round a stone pillar in the middle, and trod out by bullocks and buffaloes, when the paddy is winnowed. The best quality is reserved for seed and the rest stored for consumption or sale.

### Cardamom Cultivation

The cultivation of cardamoms was formerly second in importance to that of rice, and a fine cardamom jungle at an elevation of 3,000 to 5,000 feet was regarded as a great asset. Cardamom grows in evergreen jungle at an elevation of 3,000 to 5,000 feet, but it requires subdued light for its growth. This is obtained by the felling of trees which let in light. February or March is the time for this, and the shaking of the ground causes the young plants to shoot up in three months. The capsules appear in the third year, and ripen in September or October, when the crop is gathered. A good crop is gathered for seven years, when the felling of another big

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249 [655] tree is needed to reinvigorate them In the time of the Coorg Rajas, cardamoms were a Government monopoly. Now the jungles are held from the State on a lease of ten years.

### Coffee Cultivation

245 [177] The cultivation of coffee is another great industry in Coorg. It was first introduced by the Moplas, and the Coorgs borrowed it from them. It became a popular industry which effected great changes in their economic life. But the depression which has since followed led to the abandonment of many estates and to renewed interest in rice cultivation.

### Fruit Cultivation

Of fruit trees, plantains and oranges are common all over Coorg. Coorg oranges are famous. The best variety is the luscious loose jacket, so called because the rind of the ripe fruit is almost detached from the pulp. Pineapples, pomegrantes, and jack fruit are abundant.

231 222 237 [431] [432] ### Honey and Wax

Honey and wax are of great importance to the Coorgs. The latter is one of their articles for sale and export. The native bees are rather small, dark brown or black. Most swarms live in hollow trees or among rocks. But tht Coorgs make hives, put them near the old swarms and wash them inside with honey in the hope that new swarms will settle in them. Such swarms belong to the maker of the hive, while other swarms belong to the finder. The hives are made in hollowed logs loosely fitting in set ends. They are usually three to five feet long and about one foot in diameter. They are laid horizontally in the forks of trees often as much as 20 feet from the ground. This is to protect the swarm from animals. To obtain the honey and wax, the swarm is first stupefied with smoke from torches. The end of the comb is then fried out and all the comb is then removed at once destroying the colony. A large wooden bowl of special type is used for collecting the honey. Another method of gathering honey is to take a number of pots with small holes, the inside of which are either washed with honey or rubbed with beeswax. These pots are placed in the forest at a distance from their homes. Bees are gathered and form a colony in each pot. The inmates of the house go there at night, cover them with a kerchief, bring them home, and place them conveniently on a plank five feet from the floor, and allow them to remain until the comb is developed. [251] [252] When honey is finally gathered by pressing, it is strained through cloth, and preserved in vessels before being used. After the honey is pressed out, the residue is boiled and strained to collect wax which is poured in shallow vessels where it becomes solidified. It is then sent to the market for sale.

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### Hunting and Fishing

The Coorgs have been skilful hunters, and still keep up their hunting habits. Their chief weapons were the gun and the big knife in addition to the small handy waist knife. They no longer use the bow and arrow, or the sling. The long matchlock gun has gone out of use, and the wealthier Coorgs are now equipped with English guns and rifles of the best kind. The big broad-bladed curved Coorg knife, *odikathi*, is a most formidable weapon in a hand-to-hand fight. The bulk of them hunt partly for sport, and partly to supplement their vegetable diet. Pigs are coursed with dogs, brought to bay, and killed with spears, which are short, heavy, and broad in the blade, or with ordinary fighting spears. Old boars fight fiercely, and hunters are sometimes wounded or killed. Most animals are trapped. When they go hunting in a party, they have dogs which are set on tracking. When they bark, and the hunters approach, the animal is disturbed. It tries to run away or charges them. In the latter case they aim at the animal with guns and kill it.

In their spare moments the Coorgs fish in streams, rivers and tanks. They use nets. The ordinary one is the *thaduvala* which is spread across the stream to prevent fish from escaping. At a distance of about a furlong, they spread another net so as to drive the fish within the net. When the nets are brought closer, many fish are caught by hand. They use also another net known as *beesvala* by which they catch fish by shooting and throwing baits.

### Dietary

The Coorgs have an abundant variety of food materials. They eat pigs and goats. Their chief article of food is rice, and on festive occasions cakes and sweetmeats are prepared. Earthenware vessels are used. Their kitchens are remarkable for the cleanliness of their cooking vessels in use which are in charge of the cook. Like their Hindu sisters, the Coorg women attend on elderly members before they take meals. Before serving the meals, a little of the cooked food is offered to the family deity at the Kanni-kombare. They take an early breakfast of rice seasoned with curds and pickles. A substantial meal is taken at noon with rice and curry. At 3 p.m. kanji is again taken, and in the evening a hearty meal of boiled rice with vegetable and meat curry and other condiments. Toddy tapped from the bastard sago palm, arrack and a kind of beer made of fermented rice, brandy are the usual beverages. Of late European liquors have become common beverages at festivities.

### Coorg Hospitality

The Coorg women deserve much for their industry. They rise very early, clean the kitchen, and do all kinds of work. They bear the

brunt of the labour on the farm. The men plough the fields, transplant, and reap the rice. The women carry the manure, pluck weeds and clean the paddy. The men do no menial work. They leave that to women and servants, and enjoy a dignified repose chewing betel and gossiping. Some are expert tailors. Others with gun on shoulder wander through the jungle in search of game.

The Coorgs are noted for their hospitality and they enjoy visits from friends and relations. Should a male guest arrive, the men of the house meet him at the *kayale* and exchange greetings. The method of doing so is by both sexes alike and is very charming. The salutant being always the younger, stoops down, and touches the feet of the other who rests his head on the person concerned and blesses him. Meanwhile, the cook has spread a mat or carpet on the verandah bench, where he rests after washing his feet. He is then served with a chew, and later on with a meal, after which is discussed the special business of his visit. On his return, he pays his parting salutation in the above manner to the old men and women of the house, and the young men accompany him for some distance and take leave of him in the same manner.

When a female guest arrives, the cook or any other woman of the household meets her with a vessel of water and after saluting takes the kerchief from the guest's head and conducts her into the inner hall where she is received by the women, who enter into a free and hearty flow of conversation without any formalities. On leaving the house, the guest's kerchief is returned to her and an old man of the house with one or two women accompany her some distance. These visits of women are never made without the knowledge of their husbands, and they are always accompanied by some old man or female servant.

### Dress

The principal dress of a Coorg consists of a long coat of dark coloured cloth open in front and reaching below the knees. The sleeves end below the elbow and show the arms of a white shirt which is generally of the English pattern. This is folded across and confined at the waist by a red or blue girdle wound several times round and round, and knotted at the left front. On the right front, the Coorg short knife is stuck to the girdle having an ivory or silver handle, and fastened with silver chains. The large broad-bladed waist knife (*odikathi*) is very rarely worn. Its place is at the back, where it is carried in a brass clasp with its point directed towards the left shoulder. Like the kukri of the Gurkhas, it was a formidable weapon in hand-to-hand fighting. It is now used as a test of skill and strength on festive occasions, as when a bridegroom is expected to cut through the trunk of a plantain tree at one stroke. Their head-dress is a red kerchief or the beauti-

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ful fashioned turban, rather flat and large at top and covering a portion of the back of the neck. They are found in all shades of complexion, and when dressed in a costume they look very grand. The officers and students have now taken to the European style of dress in preference to their own. [177]

The women are more conservative in their dress. It consists of a white or light blue cotton jacket with long sleeves fitting tight and close up to the neck. The skirt is white muslin or blue cotton stuff wrapped several times round and tied at the waist by a string. One end is brought over the bosom and knotted on the right shoulder. To give usefulness to the skirt, the other end is arranged into folds, which, contrary to the fashion of Hindu women, are gathered behind. The head is covered with a white muslin and coloured kerchief, one end of which encircles the forehead, and the four corners are joined together at the back, allowing the ends to fall over the shoulders.

## Ornaments

The richness of the ornaments worn by a woman is the criterion to judge the status of a Coorg family. Glass, silver or gold bracelets are worn round their wrists. Their necks are adorned with chains of coral, pearls, or gold from which are suspended old Portuguese coins. They have ornaments for the nose and the rims of the ears. They wear gold rings or rings set with precious stones, and silver ones are worn on the toes. These are similar to those of Hindu women. The bridal dress adds to all this finery a many-coloured shawl which covers the body, and in the absence of a kerchief, golden hair ornaments, *ch uri gubbi* are worn. Coorg women are skilful in embroidery work, with which they adorn their white kerchief and the seams and corners of the men's white cotton dress. They use red marking cotton and their patterns are very complicated and elegant, and are equally visible on both sides of the dress.

## Martial Spirit

The Coorgs have earned a high reputation for their martial prowess. In the words of Lt. Connet, they may be said to be armed from their childhood and the martial spirit is inculcated from the beginning of a man's life. War and agriculture seem their twin natural pursuits, and no harm arises from this happy combination of soldier and husbandman. They show no trace of the savage disposition which often characterises the martial class. They resemble the Nayars in some respects. Both are devoted to arms. Both are characterised by a gallant spirit of generosity and delicate sentiments of honour. The feelings which attach the highlander to the mountains and that fondness for their country which distinguishes subjects of small States are observed among the Coorgs.

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## Physical and Mental Characters

The Coorgs are a hardy race. They have given proof of being brave soldiers and were much dreaded for their fierce intrepedity in encounters with their enemies. Military officers have commended their fitness for the formation of regiments. They are tall, muscular, broad-chested, strong limbed, and swift footed. Their colour is lighter than might be expected in this latitude. Their features are regular, often distinguished by an aquiline nose, and finely chiselled lips, set off by a well trimmed moustache. According to Holland, the Coorg is taller than the Yerava, has a finer nose, a larger head with a distinct tendency to brachycephalism, and a more perfect approach to orthognathism. Apart from anthropometric results, we have the contrast of colour between the fair (light brown) Coorg and the very dark skinned Yerava. The hair of the former is straight, while that of the Yerava is distinctly wavy, and the broad nose of the latter is accompanied by thick, slightly everted lips. The Coorgs and the Yeravas belong to two distinct ethnic types. The maximum, the minimum, and the average stature, cephalic and nasal indices are given below :

| | Stature | | Cephalic Index | | Nasal Index | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* |
| Max. | 184.5 | 166.0 | 90.7 | 93.2 | 100.0 | 74.0 |
| Min. | 149.1 | 131.5 | 66.5 | 70.9 | 46.3 | 50.9 |
| Avg. | 167.1 | 151 2 | 80.6 | 82.9 | 65.2 | 60.3 |

The intellectual and moral faculties of the Coorgs have been for ages dormant for want of opportunities. Consequently they have been observed to be ignorant and superstitious in common with people of lower cultures. The march of civilization during the last 50 years has brought considerable improvement. English schools for boys and girls have been started in important centres. It has been found that Coorg students are by no means backward in intellectual brightness and acquisitiveness. They have a high standard of morality in common with their brethren in other parts of India.

## Language

Richter believes that there is a close relationship between the Kodagu and other Dravidian languages ; but being neither cultivated beyond its colloquial use, nor possessing any original literature, it hardly deserves the distinction of being elevated into a special Dravidian language, as Bishop Caldwell does. It may be considered a more local dialect.

## Conclusion

The Coorgs numbered 41,026 in the Census of 1931, 20,752 being males and 20,274 females. Their mode of life and pride of race impart to their whole bearing an air of manly independence and dignified self-assertion.

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well sustained by their peculiar and picturesque costume. In the words of Sir Erskine Perry they are by far the finest race he has seen in India in point of independent bearing, good looks, and all the outward signs of well-being.

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824
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Tree Worship

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796

Huttari Festival

[Facing p. 64]

[P 64]

# CHAPTER XI

## AMMA COORG

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[162] THE Amma Coorgs belong to the indigenous priesthood of Coorg. They
[776] numbered 666 in the Census of 1931, 336 being males and 330 females. Their common name is Amma Kodagas, which would naturally signify Coorgs devoted to the worship of Amma or the goddess of the chief river of the
173 country, the Cauvery. The Brahmans invented a mythical origin which is not in accord with the Cauvery Purana.

As reward for his austerities the sage Kavera was blessed with a daughter, Kaveri, who was proposed to be given in marriage to Agastya, another sage who resided on the Brahmagiris. Kaveri did not accept the proposal. She assumed the shape of a river and fled from the mountain. Agastya in hot pursuit overtook her at Kadianad and persuaded her to submit their dispute to the arbitration of their friends. They called three families of Amma Kodagas and six of Coorgs. The former sided with Agastya and the latter with Kaveri. The Amma Kodagas decided that Kaveri should not be allowed to go. The Coorgs said that a woman should not be forced to marry against her will. This provoked Agastya, who pronounced a curse that the generation of Coorgs should become less, that their women should not tie their garments in front, that the sown rice should not grow, and that their cows should not give milk. But Kaveri Amma who was the patroness of the Coorgs counteracted the curse as well as she could, and said, "The Coorgs shall increase, but the Amma Coorgs decrease, the Coorg women shall tie their garments behind; the sown paddy shall be transplanted, the cows shall be milked after the calves have drunk". So saying, she tried to escape and on being held by Agastya by the border of her garment, she turned to the right and flowed
[778] rapidly away. Hence the place where this occurred is called Balamuri (turn-
[788] ing to the right). A linga was erected at the spot by the Brahmans. It is
485 yearly visited in the month of *November* at the time of the Kaveri feast by Coorgs and others, who bathe in the river. Dodda Vira Rajendrar built here a rest-house, which, though built a century ago, is in tolerable preservation. Nothing more is known about the real history of the Amma Coorgs,
174 but a few facts may be given as evidence that they are the remains of an
793 ancient priesthood.

101 The Amma Coorgs observe in common with the Coorgs the great fes-
793 tivals of the country, and act as priests. They dress like Coorgs and at the
[796] same time wear the holy thread. It seems that they inclined towards the

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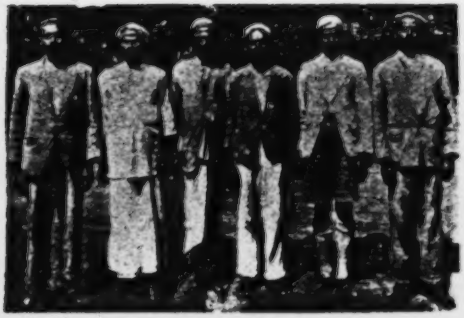
A typical Coorg in his smart attire



Amma Coorg Male Group

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An Amma Coorg House

[facing p. 65]

professed patronage of the Brahmans and that they gradually dropped into brahmanical habits of life and thought. A good many now wear the holy thread, and all profess to abstain from meat and fermented liquors. The return to Brahman initiation and dress was brought about by a Haviga Brahman whose family exercised spiritual influence over the Amma Kodagas. They are still unlettered. There is a tradition current among them that in former times one half of Coorg belonged to the Ammas, and the rest to the Coorgs. The Ammas by virtue of their priesthood held their land free of rent. Their lands are even now very lightly taxed.

### Internal Structure

The Amma Coorgs form a homogeneous community. There are two gotras among them, the Baradwaja gotra and Viswamitra gotra. They marry within the same gotra.

### Marriage Customs and Ceremonies

The Amma Coorgs do not intermarry with the Coorgs, but the separation may be of recent origin. Marriage settlement is made only after the agreement of horoscopes. The young man's father, uncle, and other close relations assemble, when coconuts, plantains, and betel leaves are handed to the bride in token of settlement. The auspicious day for celebration is fixed to send invitations to the relatives on both sides. The dress and ornaments to be given to the bride are also settled. The preliminary formalities that are gone through are :—

1. The boy's party going to the house of the bride.
2. Their welcome with refreshments.
3. Nischithambulam.

The essential formalities are *mukadarsana*, and garlanding and *panigrahana*, tali-tying, presenting the bride with the wedding dress and ornaments, and feasting. There is no *homam* as among the Coorgs, but there exists the cutting of plantains in common with the Coorgs. On the arrival of the bride at the bridegroom's house, she puts rice on the lamp. On the third day they bathe, and celebrate the *sobhanaprasta*, if the girl has attained puberty already.

### Pregnancy and Childbirth

When a girl becomes pregnant, *pumsavana* and *simantha* are performed. When she is about to become a mother, she is confined to a separate room. Her mother or some aged woman acts as midwife. Pollution lasts for eleven days after which she bathes to become pure. But it is only after 40 days that ganga puja is performed, when she bathes and becomes pure. Only then can she enter the kitchen. Cradling the baby takes place on the eleventh day. The naming ceremony takes place the same day.

# COORG TRIBES AND CASTES

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## Disposal of the Dead

The Amma Coorgs used to bury the dead which is now being abandoned. Pollution lasts for ten days.

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## Occupation

The Amma Coorgs are agriculturists They do all agricultural operations, ploughing, sowing and harvesting. Both men and women work.

## Conclusion

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The Amma Coorgs follow the Coorgs in point of inheritance. They worship the Hindu deities and observe Hindu holidays. They are inferior to the Coorgs in physical appearance and strength of body. They are now trying to improve their condition. They are strict vegetarians. They marry within the same gotra This may eventually hasten their extinction.

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